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ABSTRACT

Research is needed to determine whether American Indian students really benefit from counseling as perceived by non-Indians, the nature of current methods of formal and informal counseling of Indians, effective forms of counseling for Indians, the relationship between Indians' self-esteem and employment, factors affecting vocational decision-making, the impact of current occupational and career materials, family and tribal interests, and occupational difficulties. In terms of methodology, researchers must be aware that Indian students are unique, that English is a second language for most Indian students, that special measurement instruments having validity for Indians must be developed and used, and that results from subpopulations of Indians must not be generalized to the total Indian situation. (LS)

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VOCATIONAL AND SCHOOL COUNSELING OF INDIAN STUDENTS

A Position Paper
Submitted to
Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory

By
Alonzo T. Spang

April 1970

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Nature and Scope of the Problem:

The nature and scope of this problem is almost beyond description. It is, indeed, a critical, pathetic situation. It has been neglected far too long.

Indian students, whether in public, private (mission, etc.) or Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, are not receiving adequate counseling or they are not receiving counseling at all. Counseling which enables them to cope with their problems and life situations in general is lacking. If the school has designated an individual as the "Indian counselor," too often this person is incapable of relating effectively to the Indian students. Thus, relationships between counselor and student are shallow, misdirected and lack-luster. Too often, in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and mission schools, counseling is a disguise for discipline.

Thus, there really are no genuine, positive counseling opportunities for the Indian student.

In far too many instances, the Indian student is "counseled out" of college aspirations because he is an Indian. Too frequently, he is "counseled into" art ("all Indians are artists and can paint"), or into the skilled areas ("Indians are naturally, inherently manually dexterious").

This attitude is one of the paramount issues in the over-all nature of the problem.

Another crucial aspect of the problem lies in the irrelevancy of occupational information and materials. These materials and data are usually written for the middle-class oriented and reading society. There is a need to develop materials which the Indian student can work with and understand.

The over-all situation, tragically, is too wide spread. It is found on the reservations; off the reservation; and in all types and kinds of school systems where Indian students are enrolled. It is affecting, at a crucial stage in their development, lives of thousands of Indian youth. As Senator Edward Kennedy's Sub-Committee on Indian Education summarized, "Indian education is a national disgrace," this summary applies equally well to the vocational and school counseling services Indian students receive.

Ideally, this area or problem could be divided into vocational counseling and non-vocational (psychological, academic, etc.) counseling. The emphasis differs in each instance since both are specialized areas and areas which need much attention. However, I shall be presumptious and handle both in this paper.

Status of Current Research:

There is an acute paucity of research, and a glaring neglect, in the area of vocational counseling and almost a total lack of attention in the area of school counseling.

Educators, researchers, and others have totally neglected researching vital areas affecting the Indian student. Unfortunately, there has been a great deal of insensitivity on the part of the Indian himself so that all of the "blame" can not be heaped upon the professional only.

There are volumes of research dealing with other minority groups, such as the Black, Mexican-American, and even special minorities as the physically and emotionally handicapped, etc., but practically nothing on the Indian student.

Some of the representative research showed the following: William T. Ross and Golda Van Bruskirk Ross, "Background of Vocational Choice: An Apache Study," 1957, found among the Mescalero Apaches that: "strong bent toward clerical and outdoor-mechanical activities at all levels. Computational interest was above average but capacity did not measure up to it. Strong inclination toward artistic pursuits. They can see need for salespeople, personal service workers, etc., but they are quick to say that someone else can do that, not they. And, withdrawal and avoidance behavior was marked."

Donald A. Peterson, Northern Arizona University, wrote, in the Personnel and Guidance Journal, January, 1967, "Rehabilitation of the Culturally Different: A Model of the Individual in Cultural Change." Actually, this specifically relates to adult Indians but much material presented could easily be required in schools. If some of what Peterson states were implemented at an earlier stage, there would be less difficulty

adjusting by agencies and individuals.

Dr. Louis Bernadoni's doctoral dissertation, at Arizona State University, dealing with the White Mountain Apache Male Students' Vocational Choices, gives insight into some of the dynamics involved in making occupational decisions by high school students. He found that the parents had little impact. This dissertation makes a strong point for further in depth research. It points out there are probably differences among tribes and that these differences must be considered if the necessary understanding is to be brought about.

Dr. John Bryde's doctoral dissertation has strong implications for counseling of Indian youth at an early age. The identity crisis comes about at the most formative years of a young Indian's life according to this research. His study has resulted in a course, Acculturational Psychology, in which it appears that group counseling is really the heart of the undertaking.

Dr. C. Osborn's doctoral dissertation, University of Utah, showed that counseling had little or no impact on a select group of Southern Piautes from Utah.

From these studies and a limited number of others, we find several general conclusions about Indian students:

--That not enough research has been done to really give any clear, general understandings about the Indian student as he relates to vocational and school counseling.

--That there are a number of pre-conclusions made about Indian

students regarding their capabilities and talents.

--That, generally, Indian students do not crystallize goals until much later than their non-Indian counterparts.

--That parents do not have, at least with current measurement and assessment techniques, the impact on their children's plans as do non-Indian parents and their children.

--That unemployment rates are drastically high on most reservations--anywhere from 20% to 85%.

--That one-third (1/3) of the currently employed Indians are under-employed.

--That sixty percent (60%) of the Indians living on the reservations have less than an eighth (8th) grade education.

--That the dropout rate of the Indian student is twice that of the non-Indian.

--That, generally, commonly accepted relationships among non-Indian studies do not hold true for the Indian.

--That the suicide rate among Indian youth is much higher than the national average.

--That Indians are mistrained far too often than believed.

--That Indian youth have far too limited occupational models available to identify with.

--That Indian youth need more adequate counseling services of all kinds.

In conclusion, these identifiable characteristics are based on a very limited number of studies. However, the important aspect is that certain areas have been identified and that there is need to do much more in this field.

Needed Research:

In view of the current situation, almost any research undertaken would be a contribution to a very shallow reservoir of knowledge about this vital area.

Areas of knowledge which still need to be gathered should include the following:

1. What is the value of counseling for Indian students?

2. Must counseling take a different form as it relates to the Indian student?

3. What is the impact of the counselor? Of the parent? Of the institution? Of peers?

4. Are the same dynamics evident among Indians as to self-concept and employment as found in the non-Indian? Is there, in other words, a direct positive correlation between employment and self-concept?

5. What are some of the factors affecting vocational decision-making of Indian youth? Affecting the self-concept? Affecting over-all goals?

6. What is the impact of current occupational and career materials?

7. Need to study, in depth, cross-cultural dynamics.

8. What is the impact of vocational models in decision-making by

Indian students? Or, how do the current vocational choice theories relate to Indian students?

9. What role do non-verbal communications play in counseling with Indian students? Greater impact? Or, less impact?

The rationale for obtaining the above knowledge is based on the following:

A. There is a question as to whether or not Indian students really benefit from counseling as perceived by non-Indians. If they do not, the research should show why or the causes. Therefore, appropriate modifications can be made to make counseling more meaningful, relevant and growth producing.

B. The counselor, the educator, the parent and the administrator need to know the impact of counseling. This knowledge will directly, (should directly), affect the nature and composition of the over-all counseling program at the school level. By having an informed and an aware educational staff, the students will benefit directly.

C. It is important to know if the Indian student places as much emphasis on gainful employment as does his non-Indian peer. If not, then there must of necessity be a whole series of actions taken to bring this knowledge to bear on current approaches and practices. On the other hand, if there is a similarity, then, there is still need to make things more understandable so Indian students can be provided adequate counseling.

D. If the world of work has not been made understandable to Indian

students, then, it is long past the time it should be accomplished. There is an urgent need to know and understand how Indian students view the world of work and how they see themselves relating to it.

Recommendations for Methodology and Research Emphasis:

This author has combined research and methodology because there is an overlapping effect.

Researchers need to, and must, be cognizant of the following:

That Indian students have a unique background as they are products of another culture.

That English is a second language rather than a primary language for the vast majority of Indian students.

That special instruments must be developed if valid and reliable data is to be gathered. Also, if the unique situation of the Indian student is to be understood, and described fairly, standard instruments must not be used.

That results from studies relating to students in Indian schools must not be used to make generalizations about the total Indian student situation. There is a need, initially, to have studies done on each special group (public school students; mission school students, etc.) before generalizations are made for the total Indian student population.

That normally accepted methods of research be used but that they be tempered with a sensitivity to and acceptance of the Indian students unique situation.

In conclusion, it must be re-emphasized that this area has been greatly neglected. It is time to do something about this outrageous situation.